

STACK
ANNEX

5

115

149

2
THE OLD PATHS.

A SERMON

PREACHED AT THE

ST. JOHN'S WOOD SYNAGOGUE,

ON

SABBATH, DECEMBER 6th, 5663-1902.

BY THE

REV. DR. ADLER,

CHIEF RABBI.

PRINTED BY REQUEST.

LONDON :

WERTHEIMER, LEA & CO.,

46 & 47, LONDON WALL, AND CLIFTON HOUSE, WORSHIP STREET

1902.

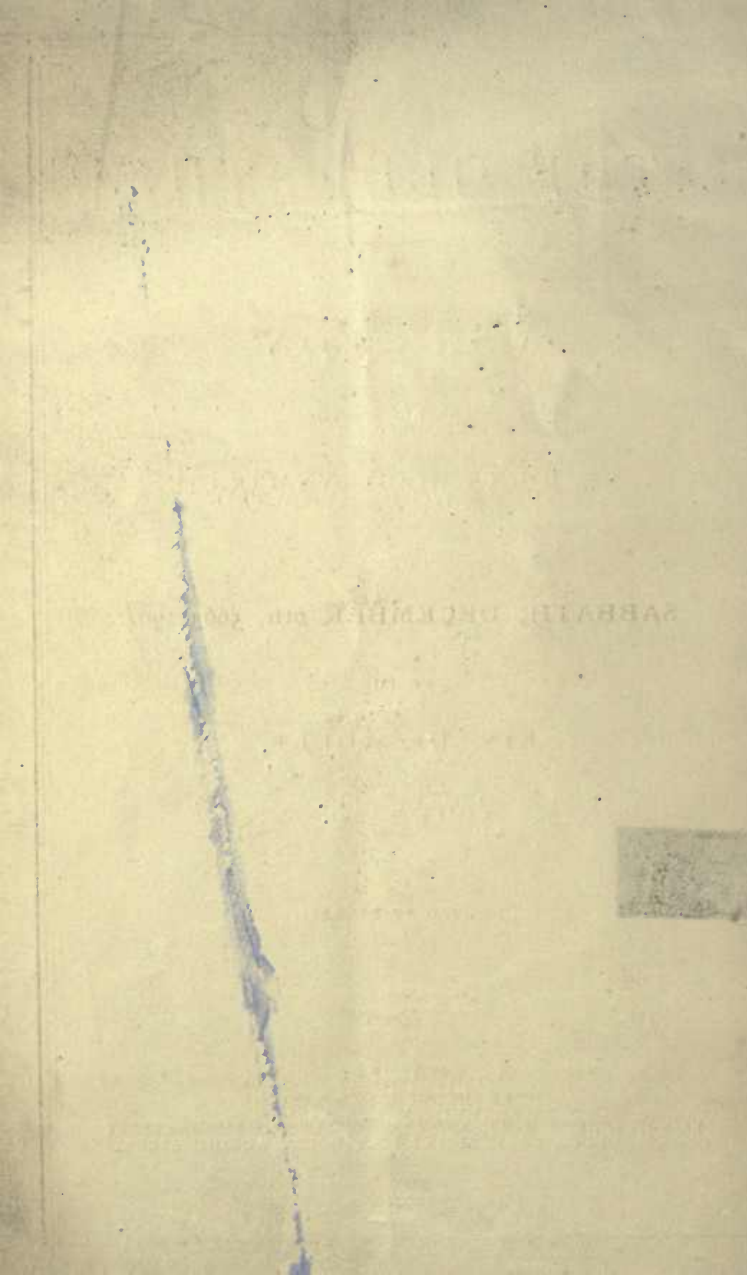
A

0000650333



UC SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY

EX



THE OLD PATHS.

A SERMON

PREACHED AT THE

ST. JOHN'S WOOD SYNAGOGUE,

ON

SABBATH, DECEMBER 6th, 5663-1902.

BY THE

REV. DR. ADLER,

CHIEF RABBI.

PRINTED BY REQUEST.

LONDON :

WERTHEIMER, LEA & CO.,

46 & 47, LONDON WALL, AND CLIFTON HOUSE, WORSHIP STREET.

1902.

THE OCEANIC

THE OCEANIC

THE OCEANIC

THE OLD PATHS.

כֹּה אָמַר יי עֲמְדוּ עַל-דִּרְכֵּי וְרֹאוּ וּשְׁאֲלוּ לִנְתִּיבוֹת
עוֹלָם אֵי-זֶה דֶּרֶךְ הַטּוֹב וּלְכוּ בָּהּ וּמְצֹאוּ מִרְחוֹץ
לְנַפְשְׁכֶם :

“ Thus saith the Lord, Stand ye in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls.”—JEREMIAH vi. 16.

MY DEAR BRETHREN,—An earnest appeal has been addressed to me by many members of the Community, to state my views touching the services which are being held at present under the direction of the new Religious Union. And charged, as I am, with a large measure of responsibility for the religious well-being of Anglo-Jewry, I dare not shrink from this task, however painful it may prove.

PURPOSE OF THE NEW UNION.

I declare at the outset that the purpose which the Jewish Religious Union has set itself is laudable. It is a worthy endeavour to devise means for deepening the religious spirit among those members of the Jewish Community who, at present, hold aloof from the Services of the Synagogue. But the question arises, Is there reason to believe that the method employed is calculated to bring about the desired end? I am constrained to cite the warning, which the author of the Kuzari relates as having been given to the King of the Chazars, when he was in search for the truth, "Thy object is worthy of all sympathy, but thy methods are not equally acceptable."

METHOD OF THE UNION.

We are all aware that the main cause of absenteeism from the Sabbath Morning Service is unwillingness, or, let us charitably presume, inability to hallow the Day of Rest. But it is asserted that the absence is due to lack of sympathy with the present Synagogue services. Now, a certain amount of discontent undoubtedly

exists, due in some measure to shortcomings on the part of those who are responsible for the conduct of those services; due also, in no slight degree, to the circumstance that Synagogue attendants are not uniformly worshippers, that they appear before the Lord empty, with a cold, irresponsible spirit, without faith in the power and efficacy of Prayer. And this scepticism has been fostered by unwise letters about the failure of the Synagogue, by articles giving the sceptic's reason why he does not go to Synagogue, and by addresses which describe the Ritual as distant, unsatisfying and unattractive.

OUR LITURGY.

Let me deal briefly with some of these criticisms. It is contended, that members of the community are out of sympathy with the Ritual, because it is couched in an unknown tongue. There would be some justification for this plea, if the worshipper, by his ignorance of Hebrew, were altogether debarred from joining in the devotions and from understanding the Torah and the Prophets read during service. But is this plea just, seeing, that in the "Authorised Daily Prayer Book" we possess a translation which reproduces the Liturgy with admirable fidelity and in terse English—a book which, by the wise generosity of a worthy sister in

Israel, has been placed within the reach of the poorest? And versions of the Bible, happily, are not less accessible.

But it is argued that there are prayers and aspirations which jar upon the feelings of men and women, who are deeply imbued with the culture of the present age. We may ask, Does then Judaism, so sublime in its purity and so pure in its sublimity, teach dogmas that are repugnant to our common sense? Granted that there are a few isolated supplications which an individual cannot conscientiously offer, does that justify absenteeism?

SEPARATION OF THE SEXES.

Yet another cause is said to promote abstention, that a husband is compelled, at the threshold of the Synagogue, to part from his wife, and a father from his daughter—an argument which I must be permitted to describe as grotesque. This lamentable separation has never for a moment kept the merchant from his counting-house, nor debarred an Englishman from delighting in his Club. But, in sooth, is the pious husband parted from his faithful helpmate in God's house? Even as Isaac intreated the Lord for (literally, over against) Rebecca, so the devout prayers of man and wife still mingle before the Heavenly Throne of Mercy.

THE NOVEL SERVICE.

And to meet these grave objections, some well-meaning men and women have departed from the old paths, and have devised a service, which has banished itself from the Synagogue on account of certain "novel features," or rather drastic innovations, that involve a departure from historic Judaism.

I have given most careful consideration to the Selection of Prayers, Psalms and Hymns which has been prepared for use at these gatherings. And I am constrained to say, that a Service which almost entirely dispenses with the use of the sacred language, a Ritual for the Sabbath Day which practically ignores the Sabbath and the Sabbath Ritual, which repudiates the predictions of our prophets, which maims some of our finest Psalms, and borrows from the Hymnary of the Church—such Service cannot, I maintain, be considered a Jewish Service.

Let me briefly state the reasons for my severe indictment. Four petitions have been retained from our Prayer-Book for use at these Services, of which, however, I understand, only one is used at each gathering. The first is a translation of the section commencing : אֶהְיֶה לְרַבָּה "With

abounding love hast Thou loved us." But there is a significant hiatus. An aspiration is omitted: "O bring us in peace from the four corners of the earth, and make us go upright to our land, for Thou art a God Who worketh salvation"—an omission, indicating that the new Union discards the belief in the in-gathering of Israel which is taught throughout the Bible.

The Sabbath Psalm has been included, but six verses have been expunged,—the sentences which speak of the destruction of the workers of iniquity, and of the perishing of God's enemies. I may fitly enquire, Is it consonant with the teachings of Judaism to ignore the punitive justice of the God of Mercy? Is there no longer any vileness in the world? Is there no further need to warn the sinner of the harvest of shame, of ruin, and of agony that springs up in the lives of the wicked? And if the compiler intended to exclude any manifestation of our Heavenly Father other than as a God of Love, how is it that one of the hymns is permitted to speak of "His chariots of wrath"? A portion of the Hallel is also presented in a mutilated form, no doubt, because, judged superficially, it would seem to be the expression of personal vindictiveness. But surely the compilers of this selection know full well the meaning of the first person singular (*Das betende Ich*) in the Psalter,

that the Psalmist voices the sentiments of the whole house of Israel, their sufferings and their complaints, their joys and their gratitude.

Coming to the hymns, it must be noted with shame and humiliation that, instead of our glorious Psalms being fully and freely used, several hymns have been borrowed from the Church Hymnary, which betray their alien origin by citations from the New Testament and the Book of Common Prayer. One of these has been composed from so essentially a Trinitarian standpoint that two lines had to be modified. Alas! it is now, as it was in Isaiah's days וּבִלְדֵי נָכָרִים יִשְׁפִּיקוּ. "They please themselves in the children of strangers" (Isaiah ii. 6). But the Yigdal, with its inspiring melody, which the Church has borrowed at least in part, has been ignobly excluded, presumably because the Union repudiates the Articles of our Creed as formulated by Maimonides.

ITS NON-JEWISH SPIRIT.

Let me ask you, my brethren, Is such a Service calculated to rouse and to deepen the *Jewish* spirit of the congregants? For it surely is not and cannot be the desire of the promoters to win adherents for Unitarian or Theistic Societies. Can it be reasonably anticipated that these gatherings

will induce abstainers to join the services of the Synagogue? Are they not calculated to invite abstention, to estrange and to deter those who have been regular attendants heretofore? What inducement will there remain to our children to undertake the task of learning Hebrew, when some kind of authoritative sanction is given to the use of the vernacular for public Prayer? Is there not reason to apprehend that the encouragement given to this attempt may lead to the establishment, not of a Synagogue but of a Church on the lines of the Temples in Berlin and in Chicago, with their Sunday Services, their abandonment of Hebrew, and what a Quarterly Reviewer, in his "Aspects of the Jewish Question" justly describes as "their exaggerated deference to the superficial customs of their non-Jewish neighbours."

ITS ATTENDANT PERIL.

It is contended, that if you are anxious to help people you must do so in the way they desire. A perilous doctrine, in sooth. And if some of those who are drifting from Judaism decline to come unless the leaders consent to meet on Sundays, to sit with uncovered heads, to adopt the Paternoster, to include Readings from the New Testament, or from the newest book of

interest, to surrender the sacred Abrahamic Covenant and to declare mixed marriages lawful, are you justified in acceding to these requests? Will such members be saved for Judaism?

HELP DEVOID OF PERIL.

But it may be argued, All that you have said is negative. Shall nothing be done to help those who persistently absent themselves from the Sabbath Morning Service? Now, surely there can be no possible objection to the institution of Sabbath Afternoon Services with special Addresses. Such Services have been held in the Great Synagogue for many years, and have attracted crowded congregations. As soon as the aim and object of the Union were brought before me I readily approved the holding of similar services in the West. But I asked that the prescribed Mincha prayers should be offered up—prayers that quiver with love and throb with gratitude for the glory and greatness of the Day of Rest. Readings from the Bible, prayers and Psalms in the vernacular might then be readily added. But the principal feature of the Service should be the Discourse, in which the Preacher should plead with

all earnestness, all the enthusiasm at his command, for the keeping of the Sabbath. He should seek to combat the evils we deplore—religious decadence, with its accompanying materialism and abstention from Divine worship. He should strive to rouse his hearers to a more loyal Jewish life, with the spirituality and the aspiration of the human soul Godward, which it enforces. These efforts should be seconded by direct personal influence. And if enthusiastic Ministers and earnest laymen would come into touch with the Jewish residents in their respective districts, impressing upon those who were systematic absentees the duty and the privilege of public worship, they would not labour for nought, nor spend their strength in vain.

I shall gladly welcome Services established on these lines in connection with one or more of the existing Synagogues. For the Service, as at present arranged, does not spell Reform, but Revolt. It makes not for Union, but Disunion. It has within itself the germs of division, discord, and severance. And assuredly at a time like the present, when our communal life is beset by dangers and difficulties on every side, we need union of hearts and efforts, but not a movement calculated to cause bitterness and estrangement in Anglo-Judaism.

LOYALTY, NOT NARROWNESS.

For a few whom the "novel features" may please and for a while attract, there are many thousands whom they grieve and irritate. It is a cheap device to call such men and women narrow. So probably the partizans of Antiochus dubbed the Maccabeans narrow, because they would not be Hellenized. So, at the present day, devout thinkers who refuse to adopt the newest agnostic theory are often stigmatised as narrow. But, my brethren, loyalty to principle; anxiety to conserve the historic continuity of Judaism; the absorbing desire to hand to our children the knowledge of our Prayers and of our Law;—this is not, and never should be called narrowness.

THE OLD PATHS.

And, therefore, I earnestly appeal to you and to the community at large, "Stand ye in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein,"—not the way of lassitude and inaction, but the good way of consistency and sacrifice, the good way of earnestness and reverence, the path to allegiance, not to alienation. "And ye shall find rest for your souls."

You will win the consciousness that you have proved yourselves a strong link among the ages, that you will entrust to sturdier hands the light of Judaism you have borne thus far, so that when you have passed away your children will take the place of their fathers, and will uphold our religious institutions with the same zeal, with, perchance, greater wisdom, and will cling to our faith and its ordinances with unswerving fidelity and unshaken loyalty. Amen.

DH



3 1158 00327 6002

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA LIBRARY

Los Angeles

the last date stamped

UC SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY



A 000 065 033 3

STACK AN